

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6399

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 7218

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJECT: ELECTION: NATIONAL FRONT WINS 13 OF 16 SEATS IN

SABAH: MINISTER DEFEATED

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 6787 DTG 100925Z JUL 78, B) KUALA LUMPUR
4619 DTG 240811Z MAY 78

1. SUMMARY. THE STAGGERED POLLING FOR THE SABAH
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION ENDED JULY 15. THE NATIONAL
FRONT (NF) WON 13 OF THE 16 SEATS, THE DEMOCRATIC
ACTION PARTY (DAP) TOOK ONE, AND INDEPENDENTS WON
TWO. THE SABAH CAMPAIGN REFLECTED THE BITTER
RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO NF PARTIES IN THE STATE.
THE DAP WIN GIVES THE PARTY A BASE IN EAST MALAYSIA
WHICH IT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY SEEK TO EXPAND. END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE SABAH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS ANNOUNCED
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JULY 16, NF CANDIDATES WON 13 OF THE 16 SEATS. THE DAP WON
ONE SEAT, GIVING THE PARTY A TOTAL OF 16 SEATS IN PARLIAMENT.
THE OTHER TWO SEATS WERE WON BY INDEPENDENTS, ONE OF THEM
OPENLY BACKED BY SABAH CHIEF MINISTER HARRIS SALLEH'S BERJAYA
PARTY IN A FIGHT AGAINST AN INDEPENDENT PUT UP BY THE
UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO). THE OTHER OPPOSITION
CANDIDATE, WHO WAS RUMORED TO HAVE BERJAYA SUPPORT, DEFEATED

USNO'S DATUK GHANI GILONG, FEDERAL MINISTER OF WORKS AND UTILITIES. THERE WAS NO SABAH STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTION. GOING INTO THE COUNTING OF THE SARAWAK VOTES ON JULY 22, THE NF HAS NOW WON 111 OF THE 133 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS SO FAR DECIDED (INCLUDING 3 UNCONTESTED SEATS IN SARAWAK AND THE INDEPENDENT OPENLY BACKED BY BERJAYA, WHO WILL NOW JOIN THE NF).

3. THE SABAH PARILIAMETARY ELECTION REFLECTED THE INTENSE RIVALRY BETWEEN BERJAYA AND USNO IN THE STATE. USNO WAS THE PARTY OF FORMER CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA, WHO INCURRED THE WRATH OF THE LATE PM RAZAK FOR HIS INDEPENDENT WAYS; BERJAYA WAS FORMED WITH SUPPORT FROM KUALA LUMPUR IN 1975 TO CHALLENGE MUSTAPHA AND THROW HIM OUT OF OFFICE, A TASK WHICH WAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE APRIL 1976 STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS. MUSTAPHA HAS SINCE RETIRED FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE, BUT, DESPITE ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION BY PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN AND OTHERS, THE TWO PARTIES REMAIN BITTER FOES. BERJAYA AND USNO AGREED TO A DIVISION OF 15 OF THE 16 SEATS FOR THIS ELECTION SINCE BOTH ARE NF PARTIES (9 FOR BERJAYA, 6 FOR USNO), AND ONLY COMPETED OPENLY AGAINST EACH OTHER IN THE ONE SEAT DESCRIBED ABOVE. HOWEVER, EVERY NF CANDIDATE EXCEPT HARRIS SALLEH WAS CHALLENGED EITHER BY INDEPENDENTS OR BY CANDIDATES OF MINOR PARTIES, AND IT WAS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ONE OR MORE CHALLENGER HAD SUPPORT FROM THE OTHER NF PARTY. IN THE END, IT TURNED OUT THAT ONLY ONE OF THESE CHALLENGERS WAS SUCCESSFUL, 27 YEAR OLD MARK KODING, WHO

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DEFEATED GHANI GILONG, A PARTICULAR TARGET OF BERJAYA SINCE HE HAD DEFECTED TO MUSTAPHA JUST BEFORE THE APRIL 1976 ELECTION AFTER JOINING BERJAYA AS A FOUNDER MEMBER IN 1975. THE POLLS DID SHOW THAT BERJAYA REMAINS A MUCH STRONGER PARTY THAN USNO, REFLECTING ITS SUPPORT AMONG THE NON-MUSLIM NATIVES OF SABAH WHO CONSIDERABLY OUTNUMBER THE MUSLIMS, THE CHIEF SUPPORTERS OF USNO. EXCEPT INSANDAKAN, WHERE THE DAP CANDIDATE WON, THE CHINESE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT BERJAYA.

4. THE SANDAKAN WIN OF THE DAP CANDIDATE, FUNG KET WING, WAS SURPRISING. MOST OBSERVERS HAD THOUGHT THE DAP'S CHANCES POOR IN SABAH, AND INDEED THE ONLY OTHER DAP CANDIDATE WHOSE NOMINATION WAS APPROVED (THREE OTHERS HAD THEIR PAPERS REJECTED ON TECHNICALITIES) LOST BADLY IN TAWAU. THE CHINESE IN SABAH ARE GENERALLY NOT AS DISCONTENT (AND THUS APT TO CAST PROTEST VOTES FOR THE OPPOSITION) AS THEIR BROTHERS IN THE PENINSULA, LARGELY BECAUSE THEY CAN PLAY A DECISIVE ROLE AS POWER BROKERS BETWEEN THE MUSLIM AND NON-MUSLIM NATIVES. HOWEVER, THE GOOD SHOWING OF THE DAP IN THE PENINSULA AND THE PERSONAL POPULARITY OF THE CANDIDATE PROBABLY INDUCED THE PREDOMINANTLY CHINESE VOTERS OF SANDAKAN TO GO WITH THE DAP. IN ADDITION, DAP LEADER LIM KIT SIANG MADE A DRAMATIC ATTEMPT

TO ENTER SABAH ON THE FINAL POLLING DAY JULY 15 AND HAD TO BE
DRAGGED BACK TO THE PLANE IN KOTA KINABALU AFTER BEING REFUSED
ENTRY TO THE STATE (WHICH ALONG WITH SARAWAK CONSTITUTION, HAS
THE RIGHT TO CONTROL ENTRY INTO THE STATE). THIS ALSO HAPPENED
TO ANOTHER DAP LEADER, LEE LAM THYE, LAST MAY (REFTEL B),
AND THE DAP IN SABAH MADE POLITICAL PERSECUTION BY THE STATE
GOVERNMENT ONE OF ITS CHIEF ISSUES IN SABAH. IN ANY CASE,
THE MAJOR SOCIALIST AND CHINESE-BASED OPPOSITION PARTY NOW
HAS A TOE-HOLD IN SABAH AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO WORK HARD TO
EXPAND THAT BASE FOR THE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTION DUE IN 1981.
THE ADDITION OF ITS MP FROM SABAH MEANS THAT THE DAP IS THE
ONLY PARTY IN MALAYSIA WITH ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE
EASTERN AND WESTERN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY.

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